Ovophagy in *Anachis avara* (Say, 1822) (Gastropoda: Columbellidae)

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Five strands of egg cases of *Melongena corona altispira* Pilsbry and Vanatta, 1934, were collected in the Indian River, near Wabasso, Indian River County, Florida in July of this year and maintained in a recirculating seawater table together with approximately fifty specimens of *Melongena corona altispira*. When examined after several hours in the seawater table, six specimens of *Anachis avara* (Say, 1822) were found on the egg capsules. The *Anachis* were removed and returned to the table approximately one meter from the egg cases. The capsules were examined and placed in a large bowl, the rim of which extended above the water level in the seawater table by two centimeters. Seawater flowed into the bowl, overflowing the rim into the table.

The following morning (12 hours later) four of the six specimens of *Anachis avara* in the seawater table were again on the flat sides of the egg capsules, each on the terminal capsule of a strand. When examined under a dissecting microscope, the columbellids were observed to have penetrated the walls of the egg cases near the centers of the capsules, and to be feeding on the *Melongena* larvae and on the dense inner layer of albuminous fluid (figure 1). To reach the egg capsules, the *Anachis* had to crawl past two large *Mercenaria mercenaria* that had been cracked open and placed in the tank to feed the *Melongena*.

Although there was not sufficient time to repeat these observations with appropriate controls, it seems clear that *Anachis avara* is capable of locating gastropod egg cases at considerable distances by chemosensory means. It is unclear whether *Anachis avara* showed a preference for egg cases over *Mercenaria mercenaria*, or if it was deterred from feeding on the bivalves by the presence of feeding *Melongena*.

Members of the family Columbellidae have extremely diverse and opportunistic diets that may consist of polychaetes, small crustacea, ascidians, hydroids, algae, organic detritus and carrion (Hatfield, 1979; Taylor *et al.*, 1980). Taylor (1987) reported that six of 16 specimens of *Mitrella scripta* examined contained gastropod eggs in their stomachs. The present observations suggest that gastropod eggs represent a significant dietary item for at least some species of columbellids.

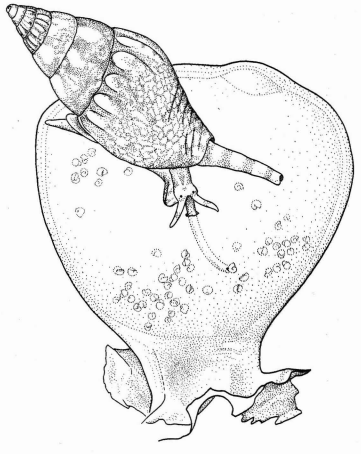

Figure 1. *Anachis avara* feeding on larvae of *Melongena corona altispira*.

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LITERATURE CITED

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